

Connecticut After School Network

Testimony to the Public Health Committee In Support of HB 5746

AAC Task Force on Childhood Obesity

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Submitted by Michelle Doucette Cunningham
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Good afternoon, Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Michelle Doucette Cunningham, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut After School Network, a statewide alliance representing the thousands of children, parents and staff who participate in after school and summer programs all across the state.

I am here this afternoon to testify in support of House Bill 5746, An Act Concerning a Task Force on Childhood Obesity. As policymakers concerned with public health, you all know of the alarming increase in childhood obesity in the past quarter century, and of the many health risks this trend poses. The costs to the State of Connecticut related to obesity are staggering:

In Connecticut, more than 3,000 people die each year from obesity and its complications. In just one year, obesity-related health problems added \$665 million in Medicaid and Medicare costs in Connecticut.¹

Afterschool programs can - and do - play an important role in promoting healthy lifestyles for youth. Many afterschool and summer learning programs offer youth an array of organized physical activities and serve healthy afternoon or summer meals and snacks while emphasizing the value of a nutritious diet through hands-on nutrition education. Afterschool programs are well-positioned to be key partners in comprehensive efforts to ensure healthy futures for our youth.

Apart from physical education classes in school, after school programs may be the only time during the day that children are encouraged to be physically active. This is important for children who do not have safe alternatives at home or in their neighborhoods. Also, after school programs provide opportunities to be active for all children – not just those who participate in sport teams or clubs.

Establishing a task force that would create a state plan to address childhood obesity is a wise step. By coordinating the many various organizations and resources within our state, the task force can build consensus on recommendations that our state needs to make a significant difference on this pervasive problem.

After school programs are already doing their part to help keep young people safe and healthy, and we look forward to working with such a task force should you pass this bill.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you this afternoon.

¹ Finkelstein, EA, et al. (2004). State-level estimates of annual medical expenditures attributable to obesity. Obesity Research 12:18-24 as cited by the Connecticut Commission on Children. Childhood Obesity in Connecticut: A Preventable Health Crisis from their website http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/PDFs/obesity/obesity_factsheet_012909.pdf